

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA'S WOMEN'S AGENDA

WOMEN

"From the first moment a woman dared to speak that hope -- dared to believe that the American Dream was meant for her too -- ordinary women have taken on extraordinary odds to give their daughters the chance for something else; for a life more equal, more free, and filled with more opportunity than they ever had. In so many ways we have succeeded, but in so many areas we have much work left to do."

-- Barack Obama, *Speech in Washington, DC*
November 10, 2005

President Obama has a long record of standing up for women. In Illinois, he passed the Equal Pay Act to give 330,000 more women protection from pay discrimination and passed another law that ensured victims of domestic violence could seek treatment without losing their jobs. In the U.S. Senate, he introduced and sponsored legislation to reduce unintended teen pregnancy, strengthen families by supporting fathers who are doing the right thing and cracking down on those who are not, guarantee workers paid sick leave, and ensure that women are not receiving less pay than men for comparable work. And throughout his career, in the Illinois Senate, the U.S. Senate, and the White House, Obama has stood up for a woman's right to choose.

Health Care

- **Fixing the Nation's Health Care System:** More than 19 million women are uninsured in this country, and women are more likely than men to delay or not get medical care because of high costs. President Obama and Vice President Biden are committed to ensuring that all Americans have health care coverage by the end of their first term in office. The Obama-Biden plan will encourage insurers and providers to adopt electronic claims systems, electronic medical records, and patient safety reporting systems. These improvements will reduce administrative costs and health care inefficiencies such as duplicative testing and medical errors, which in turn will reduce costly medical malpractice lawsuits. These common sense steps will cut overall health care costs by up to 10 percent or more.
- **Empowering Women to Prevent HIV/AIDS:** In the United States, the percentage of women diagnosed with AIDS has quadrupled over the last twenty years. Today, women account for more than one quarter of all new HIV/AIDS diagnoses. Women of color are especially hard hit: In 2004, HIV infection was the leading cause of death for African-American women between the ages of 25 and 34. Around the world, 7,000 women are infected with HIV every day. President Obama has been a leader in the global fight against AIDS. In the Senate, he introduced the Microbicide Development Act, which will accelerate the development of products that empower women in the battle against AIDS. Microbicides are a class of products currently under development that women apply topically to prevent transmission of HIV and other infections.
- **Supporting Research into Women's Health:** Heart disease is the leading cause of death among women, accounting for nearly 39 percent of all female deaths. Studies show that after a first heart attack, women are less likely than men to receive diagnostic, therapeutic, and cardiac rehabilitation procedures, and are more likely to die or have a second heart attack. Women are also more likely than men to report having arthritis,

asthma, autoimmune diseases, and depression. Health care disparities among minority and poor women are especially pervasive. President Obama has fought to maintain funding for the Centers of Excellence in Women's Health at the Department of Health and Human Services. He also supports legislation to encourage research that will examine gender and health disparities. The same legislation would establish community outreach programs in underserved areas to help women access health care and maintain healthy lifestyles.

- **Fighting Cancer:** Ovarian cancer is the fourth-leading cause of cancer-related death among women in the United States. Because of the lack of early symptoms or a proven screening test, ovarian cancer also has the highest mortality of all cancers of the female reproductive system. President Obama was an original co-sponsor of Johanna's Law, a piece of legislation signed into law in January 2007 that will educate women and increase awareness of ovarian cancer. The President has also supported efforts to combat breast cancer, another leading cause of death among women. He helped pass legislation in the Illinois State Senate to expand insurance coverage for mammograms.
- **Reducing Health Risks Due to Mercury Pollution:** More than five million women of childbearing age have high levels of toxic mercury in their blood and more than 630,000 newborns are born every year at risk. The EPA estimates that every year, more than one child in six could be at risk for developmental disorders because of mercury exposure in the mother's womb. Since the primary sources of mercury in fish are power plant emissions that contaminate our water, regulation of utility emissions is essential to protecting the health of our children. In the Senate, President Obama introduced two pieces of legislation to significantly reduce the amount of mercury that is deposited in oceans, lakes, and rivers, which in turn would reduce the amount of mercury in fish.
- **Supporting Stem Cell Research:** President Obama and Vice President Biden believe that we owe it to the American public to explore the potential of stem cells to treat the millions of people suffering from debilitating and life-threatening diseases. Obama is a co-sponsor of the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2007, which will allow research of human embryonic stem cells derived from embryos donated (with consent) from in vitro fertilization clinics. These embryos must be deemed in excess and created based solely for the purpose of fertility treatment.

Reproductive Choice

- **Supports a Woman's Right to Choose:** President Obama understands that abortion is a divisive issue, and respects those who disagree with him. However, he has been a consistent champion of reproductive choice and will make preserving women's rights under Roe v. Wade a priority in his Administration. He opposes any constitutional amendment to overturn the Supreme Court's decision in that case.
- **Preventing Unintended Pregnancy:** President Obama was an original co-sponsor of legislation to expand access to contraception, health information, and preventive services to help reduce unintended pregnancies. Introduced in January 2007, the Prevention First Act will increase funding for family planning and comprehensive sex education that teaches both abstinence and safe sex methods. The Act will also end insurance discrimination against contraception, improve awareness about emergency contraception, and provide compassionate assistance to rape victims.

Preventing Violence Against Women

- **Reducing Domestic Violence:** One in four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime. Family violence accounted for 11 percent of all violence between 1998 and 2002. As a member of the Senate, President Obama introduced legislation to combat domestic violence by providing \$25 million a year for partnerships between domestic violence prevention organizations and Fatherhood or Marriage programs to train staff in domestic violence services, provide services to families affected by domestic violence, and to develop best practices in domestic violence prevention.
- **Strengthening Domestic Violence Laws:** Approximately 1,400 women a year -- four every day -- die in the United States as a result of domestic violence. And 132,000 women report that they have been victims of a rape or attempted rape, and it is estimated that an even greater number have been raped but do not report it. In the Senate, President Obama co-sponsored and helped reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act, legislation initially written and pushed through Congress by Vice President Biden. The law funds and helps communities, nonprofit organizations, and police combat domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The reauthorized legislation establishes a sexual assault services program and provides education grants to prevent domestic violence.
- **Fighting Gender Violence Abroad:** The genocide in Darfur has had particularly devastating consequences for women. Tens of thousands of women have been killed, raped, and displaced since the conflict began in 2003. President Obama has been a leading voice in Washington urging the end of genocide in Sudan. He worked with Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) on the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act, a version of which was signed into law. The President has traveled to the United Nations to meet with Sudanese officials and visited refugee camps on the Chad-Sudan border to raise international awareness of the ongoing humanitarian disaster there. He also worked with Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) to secure \$20 million for the African Union peacekeeping mission.

Economic Issues

- **Fighting for Pay Equity:** Despite decades of progress, women still make only 77 cents for every dollar a man makes. Throughout their careers, President Obama and Vice President Biden have championed the right of women to receive equal pay for equal work. In the Illinois State Senate, President Obama cosponsored and voted for the Illinois Equal Pay Act, which provided 330,000 more women protection from pay discrimination. In the U.S. Senate, Obama joined a bipartisan group of Senators to introduce the Fair Pay Restoration Act, a bill to overturn the Supreme Court's recent 5-4 decision in Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company. The bill will restore the clear intent of Congress that workers must have a reasonable time to file a pay discrimination claim after they become victims of discriminatory compensation. The President was also a cosponsor of Senator Tom Harkin's (D-IA) Fair Pay Act, and President Obama will continue to promote paycheck equity and close the wage gap between men and women.
- **Expanding Paid Sick Days:** Today, three-out-of-four low-wage workers have no paid sick leave. It is fundamentally unfair that a single mom playing by the rules can get fired or lose wages because her child gets sick. President Obama and Vice President Biden support efforts to guarantee workers seven days of paid sick leave per year, a moderate proposal that should not impose too onerous a burden on employers.

- **Investing in Women-Owned Small Businesses:** Women are majority owners of more than 28 percent of U.S. businesses, but head less than 4 percent of venture-capital-backed firms. Women business owners are more likely than white male business owners to have their loan applications denied. President Obama and Vice President Biden will encourage investing in women-owned businesses, providing more support to women business owners, and reducing discrimination in lending.
- **Protecting Social Security:** Americans are increasingly at risk of working their entire lives only to face retirement in poverty. President Obama and Vice President Biden believe we need to preserve the character of Social Security by stopping any efforts to privatize social security. They will also work in a bipartisan way to maintain Social Security's solvency for future generations.
- **Encouraging Retirement Saving:**
 - **Create Automatic Workplace Pensions:** The Obama-Biden retirement security plan will automatically enroll workers in a workplace pension plan. Under this plan, employers who do not currently offer a retirement plan will be required to enroll their employees in a direct-deposit IRA account that is compatible to existing direct-deposit payroll systems. Employees may opt out if they choose. Experts estimate that this program will increase the savings participation rate for low and middle-income workers from its current 15 percent level to around 80 percent.
 - **Expand Retirement Savings Incentives for Working Families:** The President will ensure savings incentives are fair to all workers by creating a generous savings match for low and middle-income Americans. His plan will match 50 percent of the first \$1,000 of savings for families that earn less than \$75,000. The savings match will be automatically deposited into designated personal accounts. Over 80 percent of these savings incentives will go to new savers.

National Security

- **Caring for Women Veterans:** There are 1.7 million women veterans, a number that is increasing every day. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that was built to care for World War II veterans is not ready to handle the influx of women veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. As a member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, then Senator Obama introduced legislation to force the Pentagon and VA to better track the newest generation of veterans -- including the number of women veterans -- so that the VA can better plan their care. President Obama also introduced legislation to fight homelessness among veterans, with a special focus on treating women who may have been victims of sexual trauma. Along with Senator Claire McCaskill, President Obama co-sponsored legislation to provide funding for additional caseworkers and mental health counselors, a women's mental health treatment program, and a comprehensive mental health study of returning soldiers. The President will fight to ensure that women can get the care they deserve at the VA.

Poverty

Of the 37 million Americans living below the poverty line, approximately 14.6 million are women – a staggering number equal to the combined populations of Iowa, Indiana, and Wisconsin. And

nearly 13 million children are living in poverty, a rise of 1.3 million since 2000. President Obama and Vice President Biden are committed to a renewed effort to tackle the underlying problems that cause poverty.

- **Raise the minimum wage:** President Obama and Vice President Biden will raise the minimum wage, index it to inflation and increase the Earned Income Tax Credit to make sure that full-time workers earn a living wage that allows them to raise their families and pay for basic needs.
- **Helping Low-Income Workers:** The President and Vice President will invest \$1 billion over five years in transitional jobs and career pathway programs that implement proven methods of helping low-income Americans succeed in the workforce. They will also create a program to directly engage disadvantaged youth in energy efficiency opportunities to strengthen their communities, while also providing them with practical skills in this important high-growth career field.

Education

- **Protecting Title IX:** President Obama and Joe Biden support eliminating gender discrimination in American schools. For 35 years, Title IX has been a bulwark against sex discrimination against students and employees at all levels of education. President Obama and Vice President Biden will fight to make sure women have equal opportunities and access from pre-kindergarten through graduate school.
- **Expanding Early Childhood Education:** President Obama has been a champion of early childhood education since his years in the Illinois legislature, where he led the effort to create the Illinois Early Learning Council. He introduced a comprehensive "Zero to Five" plan to provide critical support to young children and their parents by investing \$10 billion per year to create: Early Learning Challenge Grants to stimulate and help fund state "zero to five" efforts; quadruple the number of eligible children for Early Head Start, increase Head Start funding, and improve quality for both; work to ensure all children have access to pre-school; provide affordable and high-quality child care that will promote child development and ease the burden on working families; and create a Presidential Early Learning Council to increase collaboration and program coordination across federal, state, and local levels.
- **Promoting Women in Math and Science:** Women constitute 45 percent of the workforce in the U.S., but hold just 12 percent of science and engineering jobs in business and industry. Women also make up just 9 percent of the recipients of engineering-related bachelor's degrees. President Obama and Vice President Biden believe that every student should have equal access to education in math, science, and technology in order to compete on a global scale.
- **Improving Our Schools:** From the moment our children step into a classroom, the single most important factor in determining their achievement is their teacher. President Obama and Vice President Biden value teachers and the central role that they play in education. They will work to ensure competent, effective teachers in schools that are organized for success. The Obama-Biden K-12 plan will expand service scholarships to recruit and prepare teachers who commit to working in underserved districts. To support teachers, The President and Vice President will foster ongoing improvements in teacher education, provide mentoring for beginning teachers, create incentives for shared planning and

learning time for teachers. To retain teachers, President Obama and Vice President Biden will support career pathways that provide ongoing professional development and reward accomplished teachers for their expertise. This Career Ladder initiative will help eliminate teacher shortages in hard-to-staff areas and subjects, improve teacher retention rates, strengthen teacher preparation programs, improve professional development, and better utilize and reward accomplished teachers.

- **Making College More Affordable:** President Obama and Vice President Biden will make college affordable for all Americans by creating a new American Opportunity Tax Credit. This fully refundable credit will ensure that the first \$4,000 of a college education is completely free for most Americans, and will cover two-thirds the cost of tuition at the average public college or university. Recipients of this credit will be required to conduct 100 hours of public service a year, either during the school year or over the summer months.